

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## New Slant on "The Old Man"

► Mr. Pratt is wrong when he charges Professor Baker with being symbol-minded [LETTERS, SR Sept. 27]. "The Old Man and the Sea" is lousy with allegory, but an assistant professor can see it even better than a full professor.

The Old Man is the college teacher. The eighty-four days without a fish is the dry spell between the June and September paychecks. The boy is a dual symbol: as furnisher of food before the Old Man sets out he is the local grocer carrying the teacher on credit; when the Old Man wishes he were in the boat to help, he is the assistant the teacher hasn't got to grade papers. The fish is security in a large sense, the September paycheck in particular. The teacher captures the paycheck just as he goes blind (like the Old Man) from correcting papers. The check is an ephemeral triumph. At once come the loan sharks, the landlord, the grocer, the dairy, the gas and electric companies; and the teacher is left with the skeleton—the dry little pile of receipted bills and cancelled checks. The ignorant tourists who mistake the skeleton are the Public—the taxpayers, the legislators, and the regents. ("He only teaches fifteen hours a week for nine months; he ought to be thankful for his \$3,500.") Other symbols like the Old Man's newspaper mattress, his lack of a motor boat and radio, are too obvious for comment. There is only one discrepancy: the teacher is not bored with eating.

SHERWOOD CUMMINGS.

Vermillion, S. Dak.

## Jaundice

► RICHARD L. NEUBERGER's review of "John Colter" by Burton Harris [SR Sept. 13] induced me to order a copy, but the wording of the last sentence made me shudder to see you making a "mistake that is heard almost daily in the medical profession."

"Yellow jaundice" is redundant, for jaundice itself describes a yellowness of the skin and eyes. There is no such thing as blue jaundice or pink jaundice.

Jaundice is a symptom from which no one expires. Some disease caused the jaundice and that disease killed him—not jaundice.

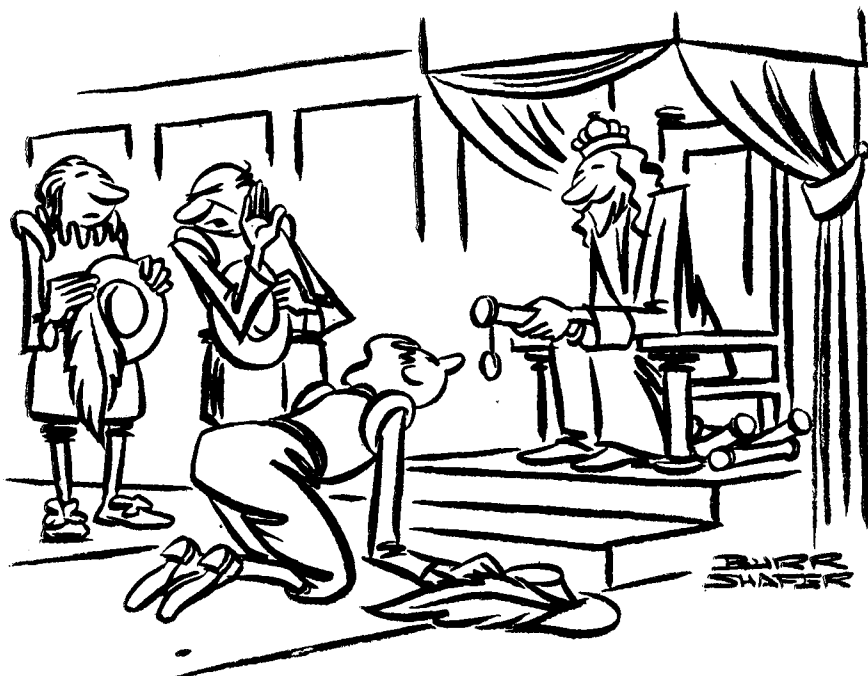
But even the medical profession can make mistakes: there was the physician who said he treated a patient for the symptom of jaundice for almost a year until the patient told him that he was Chinese.

MARVIN L. THOMPSON, M.D.

Berlin, N. Y.

## In Defense of FDR

► To CHARLES H. NEWMAN, who asks your reviewer of Hoover's "Memoirs" and your readers whether or not Roosevelt was a radical [LETTERS, SR Oct. 18], the answer is, "Yes, but." Roosevelt's changes in



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Be careful on these land grants. I've heard he's trying to stick you with New Jersey."

law were radical, but not as radical as they might have been if he had wished. To Mr. Newman's question about Roosevelt using Fascist methods, the answer is, "No." If he cannot distinguish between the methods of Hitler and the methods of Roosevelt, one can easily understand why he thinks Hoover is objective.

DAVID W. MATHEWS.

Macedonia, O.

## Peerless Leader

► PLEASE ALLOW ME to answer Mr. Charles H. Newman's rhetorical question: "Is it so strange that the New Deal should be labeled 'radical' or be coupled at times with the terms Fascism, Socialism, and Communism?"

YES! It is passing strange and utterly untrue. Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal are purely humanitarian, and Mr. Roosevelt will go down in history as a humanist. No President since Lincoln will go down in history except Roosevelt, more loved by so many Americans. Can that be said of any Fascist, Communist, or Socialist?

Probably this thought came to many of us as it did to me: "He thought of us, the average person, and did what he could for us. As well as my forty-four hour government work I'll do what volunteer work I can to show my gratitude and help win the war."

As an Army officer's wife I lived through four regimes in Washington, shaking hands with Wilson, Coolidge, Harding, and Hoover at White House receptions. They never gave me the sense of belonging and serving my country that Roosevelt did. I am not alone. Thousands

of Americans have that same glow of memory in their hearts, and all the petty sniping will never change it.

WINIFRED CULLUM.

Rhinebeck, N. Y.

## Rights or Magnanimity?

► HARRISON SMITH'S EDITORIAL on "The Equilibrium of Freedom" [SR Oct. 25] seems to accept with approval Eugene Lyons's statement that persons named as Communists are still at large and some are teaching in schools. Why should they not be at large? Mr. Smith impliedly feels that this is evidence of magnanimity. By so doing he goes along with those who feel that an accusation of Communism is proof of guilt. That is what those who believe in the principle of presumption of innocence have been fighting. It is disturbing to see that Mr. Smith accepts such a concept.

It should be observed that most of these charges come from ex-Communists, which I admit is probably the only available source. Without corroboration should we take the word of the accomplice without anything further? Yet the same people insist that Communists should not be believed. Does this mean that we must swallow what an ex-Communist now says?

Are writers still free? Forget not a certain Senator's threat to appeal to advertisers to withhold their patronage from *Time* magazine. How long could a magazine last if that is effective?

Surely Mr. Smith does not go along with McCarthy and "Red Channels!"

NORMAN M. BEHR.

New York, N. Y.

**Writers & Writing.** People like to read about people—which makes biographies, memoirs, and letters a matter of constant interest. This week's assortment of personalia provides a gourmet's variety by and about literary people. A literary light of another generation, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once commented: "Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book." The truth of this becomes clear on glancing at the roster of writers with which our reviewers concern themselves: Stephen Crane, Sean O'Casey, Sinclair Lewis, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edmund Wilson, John Mason Brown. The letters of Sinclair Lewis written between 1919 and 1930, edited by Harrison Smith, who was a friend of the late writer, reveal a provocative personality in the flamboyant rise "From Main Street to Stockholm" (below). Other turbulent and barbed careers are reflected in O'Casey's autobiographical "Rose and Crown" (page 25) and "The Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay" (page 26).



delicate episode with Paul de Kruif who wanted a more direct acknowledgment for his work on "Arrow-smith." Lewis was hurt by this, and could not perhaps quite understand it. "Edna St. Vincent Millay is here, and I'm trying to decide whether, as an agent of the firm, I want to tie her up with a contract," he wrote from Rome later. "Her poetry is splendid, and much worth having, and she is planning a novel. But the devil of it is that she quite definitely plans to make this a novel that would be sure to be suppressed—and she wants enough advance to live on for four months while writing it!"

For a moment the two poles of the literary movement in the 1920's met and touched—there were sparks—and yet *this*, I think, somewhere in those buried depths, Lewis could understand. The statements on his rejection of both the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Pulitzer Prize award were admirable, as was his Nobel Prize address. There was something appealing—something of the older village atheist and dissenter in our tradition—in the spectacle of a Lewis who defied God to strike him dead while he was writing "Elmer Gantry"—even though the Lord refused the challenge. There are very touching letters about the separation from his first wife, Grace Hegger Lewis; her own eloquent letters of despair are here, too. When Lewis first met Dorothy Thompson in Berlin, he noted that "I haven't had and, what is more curious, haven't wanted a drop of whiskey, gin, rum, brandy . . . for a long time now." He hoped he was going to be able to save money and live less expensively in his new life. Within a few months, fixing over their Vermont farm house, he was broke.

The rupture with Harcourt after the Nobel Prize comes as another one of the unexpected twists in the narrative: unexpected, distressing, and yet, quite logical. For the small-town world of Babbitt whose unique historical voice Lewis had been (this narrow, shadowy world which its petty potentates of commerce thought was the only world) had already disappeared from the center of the historical scene. The 1930's and 1940's were the beginning of a new epoch, where Lewis was never again to feel quite at home. But meanwhile he had made the bustling phantoms of Zenith immortal.

## *A Puritan for All*

**FROM MAIN STREET TO STOCKHOLM:** *Letters of Sinclair Lewis 1919-1930. Edited by Harrison Smith. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 307 pp: \$5.*

By MAXWELL GEISMAR

**T**HIS volume of Sinclair Lewis's letters, interesting and illuminating in many ways, deals with the first decade of his literary career. They are letters to his publisher, Harcourt, Brace. But Lewis's relationship with this firm was so close—not only with Alfred Harcourt but with Donald Brace, Harrison Smith, and other members of the house—that they are also very personal and, as it were, even family letters. They throw a strong light, and I must add at times a rather curious light, upon the writer and his work.

It was the period of Lewis's beginnings, and of his greatest success: "Main Street," "Babbitt," "Arrow-smith" and "Elmer Gantry." These books brought the literary revolt of the 1920's into the popular mind in a way that no other writer of the period had succeeded in doing; in this sense too they were a culmination of the realistic movement in our literature which had started a quarter of a century before with "Maggie," "McTeague," and "Sister Carrie." Yet our first impression of Lewis himself—in

the letters at least—is that he was only concerned with publicity and advertising campaigns. He objected to the ads for "Free Air," his romance of the automobile, because they did not stress that it had "the dignity of realism." He wanted to put signs about the novel on every garage in America.

He was imbued surely with that native conviction that the machine would construct a new highway to paradise. After Lindbergh's flight—and after he had written his serious books—he remembered another early novel about airplanes and cabled from Paris: "Why don't Grosset start intensive campaign Trail Hawk which is really story Lindbergh. Can hook up with fact we born forty miles apart." Indeed, when "Main Street" first began to catch on with the popular audience, Lewis seemed to go absolutely berserk with ideas—gags, angles, stunts—for pushing the novel along even faster. What one misses in the early sections of the letters is the sense of Lewis's position as a writer, or even perhaps as a human being. There are few moments of reflection; of his dealings with other people, or other books; there is almost nothing except enthusiasm or rejection. "Since writing you the most interesting person I've met has been Rebecca West. If she proves not to be too tied up to Century, I may try to pinch her off. Same with Norman Angell."

All the same, the letters are filled with fascinating side-lights and glimpses of the artist who was hidden away beneath all this. One notices the early titles for "Babbitt," which was originally to be called "Burgess" or "Fitch"; while "Elmer Gantry" was at first titled "Rev. Bloor." There is a

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